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May 4, 2006

Dorcas R. Hardy, Chairman  
White House Conference on Aging Policy Committee  
4350 East-West Highway, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Bethesda, Maryland 20814

Dear Ms. Hardy:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer feedback on the preliminary report of the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. We share your concern that we must begin to address the issue of an aging baby boom population and the impacts that will have on our public and private programs, communities, businesses and most importantly our aging citizens and their loved ones.

Missouri's seniors play a very important role in the cultural and economic life of our state. Our vision is to keep our seniors living active and independent lives in their communities where they can enjoy their families, friends and neighbors and the contributions they have made and will continue to make. In Missouri, we are working to ensure that seniors have the resources they need to remain in their own homes. The first two budgets since we took office have included funding increases for in-home care providers to ensure that these providers can recruit and retain high quality employees to assist our seniors in their own homes, thus improving the quality and availability of in-home care and ensuring the safety and well-being of our senior population. The current budget recommendation, which is currently awaiting legislative approval, includes an increase for our senior nutrition program which provides home-delivered meals to seniors.

We also feel very strongly that every county in Missouri should have a vibrant senior center to provide opportunities for seniors to socialize and receive information about the services available to them. The current budget recommendation also includes funding to ensure that all Missouri counties have a senior center/nutrition site, which would offer the opportunity for older Missourians to meet their nutritional, social, and physical needs. Missouri has also been working very hard with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to get our seniors enrolled in the new Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit and to quickly address any problems our seniors may face as the new benefit is implemented. In the near future, we hope to explore the issues of the availability of transportation and affordable housing.

While many of the resolutions adopted by the Conference are consistent with our vision for healthy, active and independent seniors, we would like to highlight several that we feel are of particular importance to Missouri.

We strongly support Resolution 17 which calls for the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act within the first six months following the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. The Older Americans Act provides a critical source of funding for providing many of the services that allow seniors to stay in their homes and failure to reauthorize this funding would place many important senior programs in jeopardy. From its inception, the OAA has been the cornerstone of services for the nation's older adults. It has built an aging network, working in partnership with local providers and community organizations that have a long-standing commitment to meeting the service demands of our aging population. The aging network has the ability to provide a cost-effective alternative within the nation's long-term care system. Services provided by the OAA include supportive services such as in-home, transportation, information and assistance, family caregiver, ombudsman, legal, older worker and nutrition programs.

There are many issues Congress must examine while considering the reauthorization of the OAA. The current aging boom is also a longevity boom. Seniors live longer and require services over a longer period of time. Senior nutrition is an especially important issue to consider. Proper nutrition promotes healthy aging and has a positive impact on the quality of life in older adults. In Missouri, 43% of the congregate recipients are at high nutritional risk and 73% of home delivered meals recipients are at a high nutritional risk.

Transportation is a top priority for Missouri seniors, especially in rural areas. We support Resolution 22, which aims to ensure that seniors have sufficient transportation options to support their independence. Missouri will be looking to maximize federal resources provided for transportation, while also exploring options for additional sources of funding.

Resolution 24 is also of particular interest to Missouri. The supply of affordable housing for seniors is far outstripped by demand. This shortage of affordable housing will only be exacerbated by the growing number of older Missourians. We are committed to exploring programs that offer low cost, high quality solutions for the housing issues faced by seniors in Missouri.

Resolution 34 is another key to ensuring quality of life for older Missourians. Missouri has had success with a number of small pilot projects to use disease management to improve health outcomes for individuals with chronic conditions. We firmly believe that through better management of these chronic conditions, we can effectively delay the onset of higher disease states in individuals with chronic conditions, delaying the need for higher levels of care. Healthier seniors will be in a much better position to remain in their communities longer. We hope to implement the Chronic Care Improvement Program (CCIP) in the Missouri Medicaid program in the very near future. CCIP will work with Medicaid recipients multiple chronic co-morbidities, many who are seniors, to provide intensive care coordination with the goal of improving health outcomes and lowering cost.

The current system of financing long-term care depends heavily on public programs to bear the rapidly increasing cost burden. As the population needing long-term care grows, these public programs will not be sustainable. As suggested in Resolution 5, we must begin

adopting policies now that will encourage the private sector to create private market solutions that consumers anticipating a need for long-term care will find attractive.

Many times it can be difficult and confusing for seniors and their families to navigate the complex array of services that are available to them at the state and local level. Resolution 71 speaks to the need to improve the integration of state and local delivery systems. By giving our seniors the ability to navigate the systems of services available, we can make it much easier for them to access those services they need to remain in the community. In Missouri, we are exploring ways to create a single entry point for state government such as an Access Missouri 311 that will allow people to call any state agency through a single phone number. We will also continue to explore other ways to integrate service delivery systems for seniors that will improve efficiency and make it easier for seniors to get the services they need.

We also feel that it is very important that we protect our seniors from criminals who may try to prey on them through violence, neglect and financial exploitation. We support Resolution 19 which calls for the creation of a national strategy for promoting elder justice through prevention and prosecution of elder abuse. During the State of the State Address this year, the General Assembly was called upon to strengthen Missouri's laws regarding elder abuse. We hope to receive legislation very soon that will increase penalties and require jail time for certain crimes against our senior citizens.

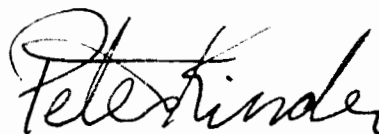
Finally, Resolution 57 was not adopted by the White House Conference, but we feel it is important nonetheless. Resolution 57 recommends the promotion of lifelong learning and e-literacy for older adults. We believe that such an effort will benefit our seniors by increasing their opportunity for social interaction and cognitive stimulation and arm them with an additional tool to find resources that they need. In Missouri, many seniors are eligible for free or reduced cost tuition at many of Missouri's higher education institutions. My goal is to better market this opportunity so that more seniors take advantage of it. We also hope to explore public/private partnerships that would allow us to place computers with Internet access in every senior center in the state so our seniors can learn valuable computer skills, email their grandchildren and access information that can help them in their everyday lives.

We appreciate your work and share your concern about this very important issue. We look forward to receiving your final report and to continuing the important task of planning for the impacts of our aging population. Thank you again for the opportunity to offer feedback and please do not hesitate to contact us again if we may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Matt Blunt  
Governor



Peter Kinder  
Lieutenant Governor